

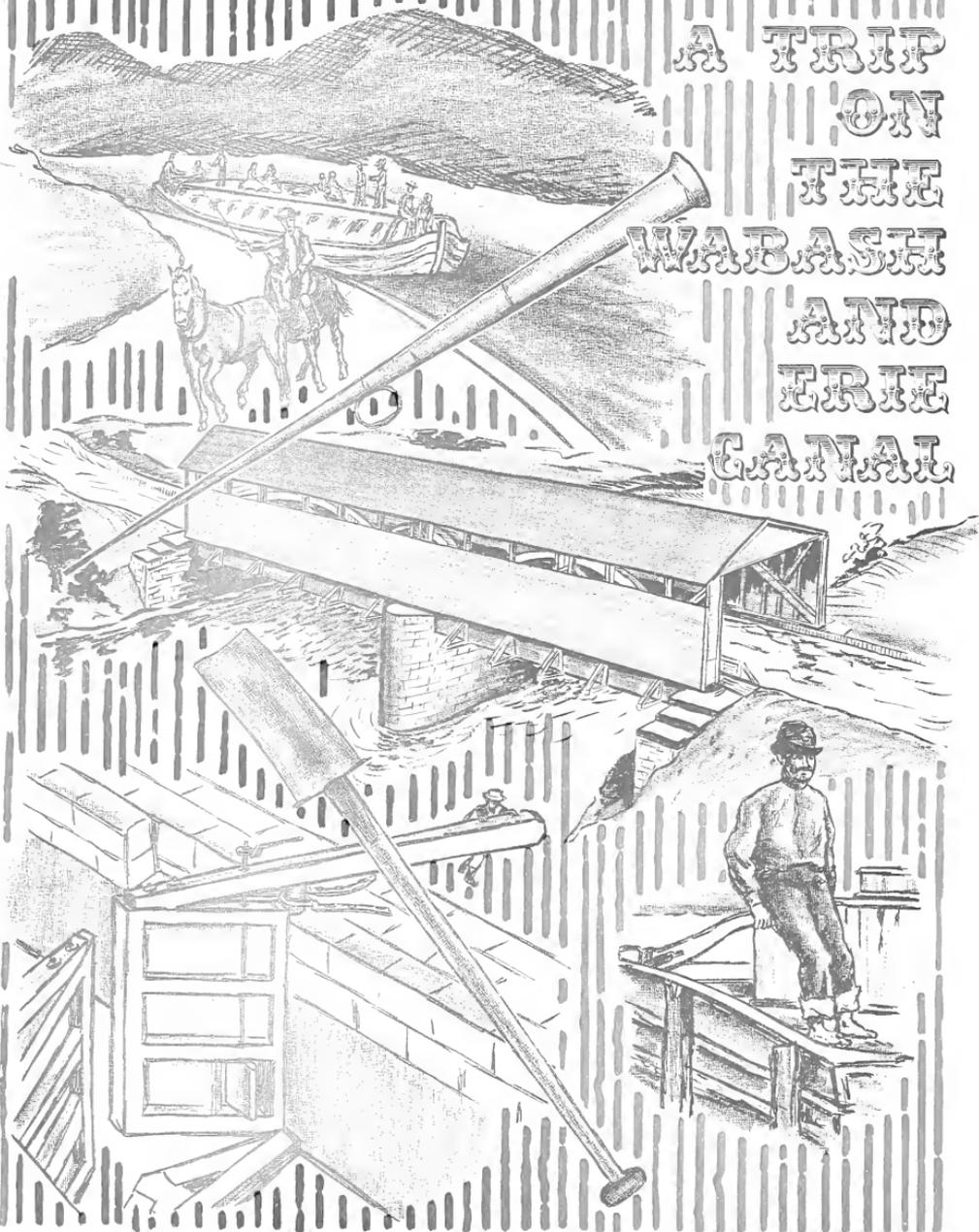


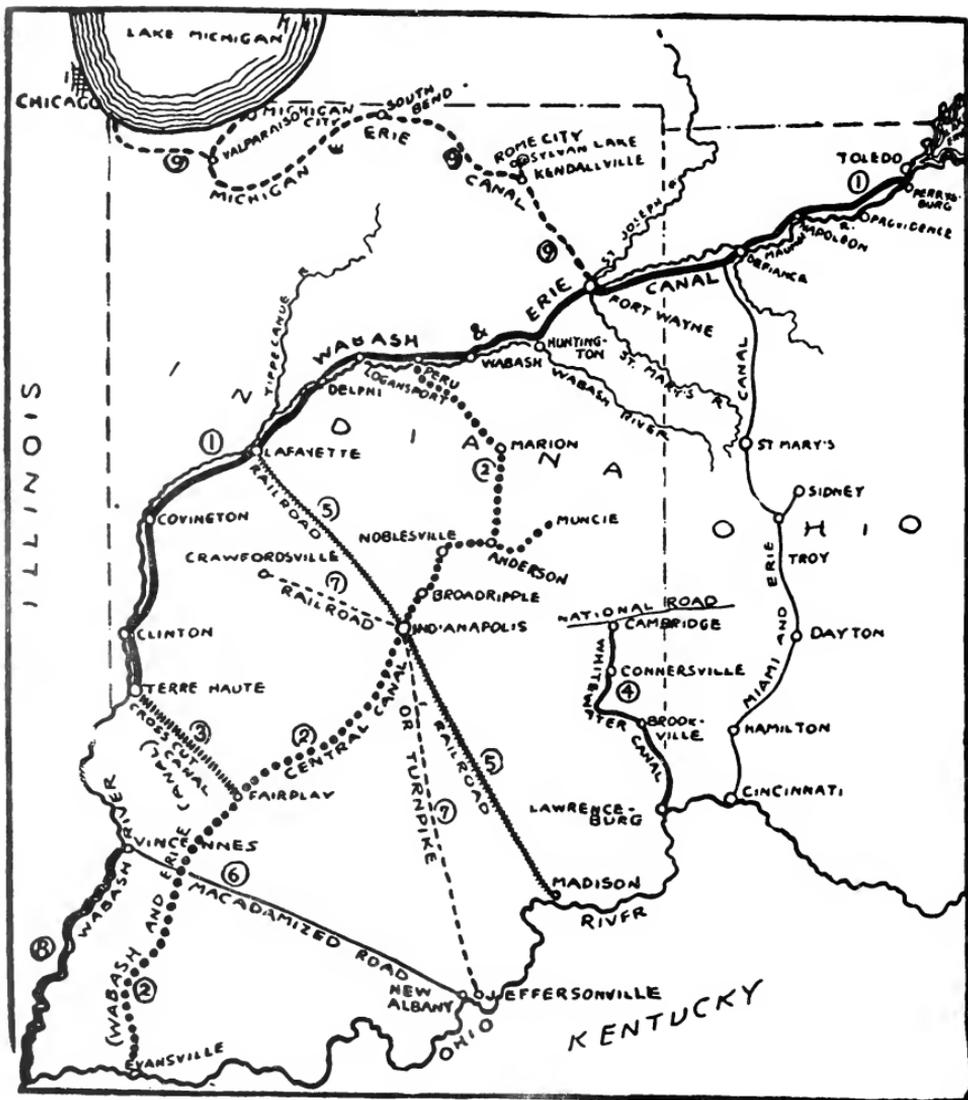


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Steele, Marilyn.  
A trip on the Wabash and  
Erie Canal



# A TRIP ON THE WABASH AND ERIE CANAL





A TRIP ON  
THE  
WABASH  
AND  
ERIE  
CANAL

TEXT:

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# A TRIP ON THE WARABASH AND ERIE CANAL

"Ma, Ma! Pa says to get the baby ready and come. The canal packet is nearly ready to load and leave Toledo. He wants to make sure we get a comfortable place for you to put the baby." Daniel ran to where his mother was sitting holding his baby brother. Becky jumped up and down and seemed to ask Daniel a thousand questions all at once.

He accepted the fact that she considered him wise in the ways of canal boats. He had gone with his father the night before when they had made arrangements to take the packet boat to Fort Wayne.

"What was that horn we heard, Daniel? Was that from the boat?" Becky finally managed to get up to Daniel to ask.

Daniel bent over to help his mother gather up some of the baskets and bundles as he answered her. "Yes, that was from the boat, and you should see it, Becky. The horn is longer than you are tall and the captain let me try to blow it. I tried, but I couldn't make it blow."

"Becky, you carry this bundle of the baby's things and let's go over to where your father is waving to us. I think he is getting anxious." Mother interrupted the children's conversation, and led the little group to the landing. There a plank had been laid that led onto the packet boat.

Becky spelled out the name as they came up to it, "I-N-D-I-A-N-A. We're going to Indiana and we are going on the Indiana," she said, carefully watching her feet as she inched her way along the plank onto the boat.

It felt good to have Pa lift her over the last few steps and set her down on the deck. Then he reached over to help Ma and the baby. Daniel strode boldly on with his bundles and led the way to the corner that he and Pa had selected as the best place to sit. He knew that they had 104 miles to travel on the canal before they would reach Fort Wayne.

He was trying to figure in his head how long that would be at four miles an hour. He said out loud, "I guess it will take up about twenty six hours to get to Fort Wayne from Toledo."

"Well, young man, that's pretty good figuring, but that doesn't allow for any stops or delays along the way. I'm afraid you have to count on some of those between here and there." It was the captain, Thomas Filton, who had spoken to Daniel.

"Besides the towns where we will stop to deliver and pick up some more passengers, there are the locks to go through. Then we always have to slow down a little when we pass a boat going the other way."

The captain walked toward the front of the boat to check the ropes that were attached to the horses waiting on the towpath beside the canal. He signaled the driver that all was ready and the horses started off at a trot.

Daniel watched as the rope became taut from the boat to the horses. "How much rope do you need, Captain?"

"Well, Daniel, that rope is about 150 feet long and it is three inches



*Mules pulled canal boats along tow path.*

thick, so you can see it is good and strong. The six horses will stay about fifty yards ahead of our boat along the towpath. Some of the smaller boats have only two horses but that wouldn't be enough to pull this packet." The captain went to the other side of the boat. Daniel stayed to watch the horses as the city of Toledo was left behind.

Becky came to stand by his side and shared what she had learned about the cabin. "You and Pa won't be able to sleep inside the cabin," she revealed. "That is just for the ladies."

"I didn't see any beds," said Daniel, "do you sleep standing up?"

"Of course not. Didn't you see the hooks and ropes in there?" They put up berths with mattresses on them and Ma says I can sleep on the top one. I think they have some like that for you too, but they can't be put up until after dinner because that is where we will eat."

"Daniel, my boy," called his father, "have you seen Captain Filton? I want to know how soon we will be stopping at a lock."

"What's a lock, Pa? Does it have a key?" asked Becky.

"No, no, not that kind of lock," laughed her father. "Let's find Captain

Filton and let him tell you about the kind of locks I mean."

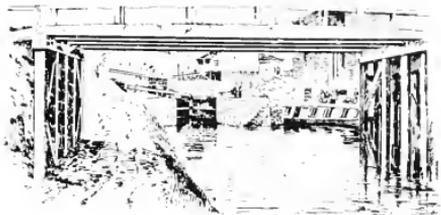
## Going Through A Lock

They found the captain talking to a young man, not too much older than Daniel himself.

"Hello, there, Mr. Mathews," the captain greeted them. "Is your wife comfortably settled with the baby? Say, Daniel, you might like to meet Jonathan, our bowsman, and watch him in a few minutes. When we get to the first lock, he will have to get out and open the gates so we can let the boat in. Then he will shut them so the water can lift our boat to the level of the water beyond. That is one of the places where we take a little more time than you figured. It takes about ten minutes for each foot we have to rise."

"I don't understand why we have to rise," Daniel looked puzzled. "Is the water going to be deeper?"

"No, the water on the other side of the lock won't be any deeper, but it is 181 feet higher above sea level at Fort Wayne than it was when we left



*A typical canal lock.*

Toledo. We have to get to that height gradually by going through twenty-five sets of locks in that distance." Captain

Filton reached for the long tin horn to signal the gate keeper of their approach as the lock and the mill beside it came into view.

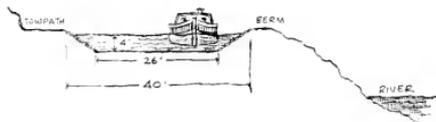
A boat was just about to be let out of the lock as the Indiana came up, so Captain Filton signaled to the steersman to turn out to the right and let it pass. The steersman on the other boat did the same. As they came along side of each other, Daniel could see why, as there wasn't much room between them.

"How wide is the canal here?" Pa asked.

"Let's see if Daniel can figure this out," answered the captain.

"Dan, do you remember I told you this boat is thirteen feet wide? Well, that boat is a little bigger, fifteen feet I believe, and I'd guess there was about six feet between us and about three feet of water on the other side of both boats from the bank. Can you add all that up and tell your father how wide the canal is?"

Daniel wrinkled up his face and wrote in the palm of his hand with his finger. In a minute he brightened up and said, "Yes, Sir. The canal must be forty feet wide."



*Canal cross-cut view.*

His father was obviously pleased at Daniel's mathematical figuring. "As long as you are giving us some figures, Captain, how deep is the canal?"

"It is only a little over four feet deep," he answered, "but the edges of the bank slope in, so it is only about twenty six feet wide at the bottom,

but since it is flat it is just as deep all along."

As the boats pulled apart, the second one heading on to Toledo, Pa realized that there were no passengers on it, just barrels of goods. The captain, who noticed Pa's expression, commented, "The boats going east are mostly loaded with farmers' produce at this time of the fall. By the end of this month there won't be too many more people going west this year. It looks like this month of October, 1848, will go down as the busiest one yet on the Wabash and Erie Canal. There are as many as 400 boats using the canal now, or there would be if they were all running at once. Of course, there are always some out of service that have to be repaired. When the water gets low in places and they run aground, it tears the bottoms out and they have to be taken up in dry dock to be fixed."

"We've been moving right along since we left Toledo," Pa commented. "What happens if we meet a slower boat, do the boats ever run into each other or get the ropes tangled?"

"I guess they could, but I wouldn't be a very good captain if I let that happen. Passenger packets are given the right of way. If we come up to a slower boat the bowsmen let out some of the extra rope so we can pass, our boat going over their line of rope."

"I wondered why you have all that extra rope coiled up there," said Daniel, pleased to have observed that fact.

While they had been talking, Jonathan had jumped from the boat to the "berm" which is what the bank between the canal and the towpath is called. He ran on ahead to the first gate of the lock and turned the crank to swing out the boom and open the gate. The boat passed on in and he

closed the gates behind them. The gate keeper opened the flume so that the water could flow in and they felt the boat begin to rise slowly in the lock.

Becky came running up then and pointed as she called, "Look at the little river going the other direction over there!"

Her father caught her up in his arms as she leaned over to watch the water coming in around the boat.

"Howdy, Mam," Captain Filton greeted Mrs. Mathews who had joined them as they watched the boat through the locks.

"Ma, where did you leave the baby, is it all right for him to be alone?" Daniel felt quite responsible for his younger brother.

"Ma isn't going to neglect him, don't you worry," Pa smiled reassuringly at Daniel and then looked at Ma with the same question in his eyes.

Ma laughed at them both and opened the bundle she had in her arms to reveal the baby snuggled down and completely covered with the soft blanket.

"Isn't it too hot for him all wrapped up like that?" Daniel reached to take the infant from his mother.

"Well," his mother tucked the covers back over the baby's face as Daniel cradled him in his arms. "It seemed to be a choice of having him eaten alive by the mosquitoes or being a little warm in the covers. It seemed better to just cover him up. Are the mosquitoes always this bad, Captain Filton?"

"Sometimes we have an early frost and they are mostly gone by this time of the year, but I'm afraid on this trip they may get worse than they are now. When we get near Defiance and before we get to Fort Wayne we have to go by the worst of the Black Swamp and

they are really thick there." The captain was not too encouraging.



"At least it should be cooler in the evening and at night so the extra clothes won't seem so warm," said Pa.

"If the ladies open the curtain to their sleeping section it will be a little cooler, but unless a real breeze comes up we don't notice much improvement in the situation." As Captain Filton finished talking the boat had passed out of the lock and was back in the main canal.

Jonathan jumped quickly back onto the deck and smiled at Daniel. "Would you like to see what else a bowsman does on a canal packet?" he asked the younger boy.

## Captain Filton Tells Father About Lewis Cass

Daniel looked at his parents to make sure it was all right for him to go with Jonathan. His father nodded his permission as he turned to continue his conversation with the captain.

"Were you in Fort Wayne last year when they had the big celebration to honor the opening of the whole canal?" asked Pa.

"I wouldn't have missed it for the world," answered the captain, then he started to chuckle to himself as he recalled the gala affair.

"You know, General Lewis Cass, one of the candidates for president this year, was the main speaker and the guest of honor at the celebration they

had there in 1843. He is really a big man. As he was stepping off the boat that brought him to town he missed his footing and down he went into the canal with a splash. He managed to get back out, with help. He went on with his speech as planned, but quite a few people haven't forgotten about that and I've noticed that the Whig Party likes to remind people about it quite often." Captain Filton was feeling quite chatty on this subject.

"I'm not sure if I'll vote for him or not, but it does seem a shame that with all the things to his credit, like being a governor and a senator, he might be defeated because he slipped once." Pa had given some thought to the subject too, as had many others at that time.

In the meantime, Daniel and Jonathan were up in the cabin with the cook checking on how the meal was coming.

"Daniel, do you want to help me get the planks set up for the dinner table? Then we can go over and walk along the towpath with the horses while the driver eats his dinner. Do you think your Pa will let you?" Daniel followed Jonathan around as he was talking.

"Will we go through another lock soon?" asked Daniel. He was hoping to be able to watch Jonathan operate the gates.

"As a matter of fact, we will go through fourteen altogether before we get to Defiance," explained the bowsman. "Then at Defiance we go through six that are fairly close together. Most of the locks on the canal have sides that are made of wood from the forests along the way. When we come to one that is stone, that is the Guard Lock and you know we are almost to Defiance then."

By this time the boys had finished their task of setting up the tables. They went out on deck again to see what Pa said about Daniel joining Jonathan on the towpath.

The men motioned to the boys to be quiet as they came up and Captain



*Canal boat loaded with fire wood for trip between New Haven and Fort Wayne, last used portion of the canal in this area.*

Filton pointed ahead to a doe and her fawn drinking at the edge of the canal. Becky came up at the same time and she couldn't help letting out a squeal as she spotted the animals. At the sudden sound the deer looked up and then bounded away back into the woods. Just their white tails were in sight for an instant and then it was as still as if they had never been there.

Daniel looked disgustedly at his sister but Captain Filton assured him that it wasn't too unusual a sight. Not only were they likely to see more deer along the way, but bear as well.

As the day passed, Daniel and Jonathan got to be better acquainted as the younger boy helped his new friend. They cleaned the deck after the meals and watched as the other members of the crew came to help put up the berths for the night.

These were planks of wood about five feet and a half by two feet and were attached to the wall by hooks and ropes. The mattresses were not very thick and Daniel couldn't imagine that they would be very comfortable.

## The Boat Passes Through Defiance, Ohio

It was just dusk when the locks at Defiance, Ohio were passed. There were six of them as Jonathan had said. He was so busy that he didn't have time to visit with Daniel so the boy joined his family as they observed the town and area they were going through. To cross the Maumee River at Defiance the boat was pulled by mules who walked on a special bridge built just for them and separate from the one the people and wagons used. At the other side of the river was a station where a fresh team of horses was attached to the towline. The sun was just about down as the last of the locks was passed.

"I wish we owned all the horses that have pulled the boat today," Daniel commented. "They would be a big help when we get started on clearing our land at Fort Wayne."

"We wouldn't need quite that many son," Pa said. "There has been a new team about every ten miles or so and we couldn't feed that many and have anything left to sell. We could use some, though, you are right about that."

Daniel and his father joined the other men who were settling down for the night on the open deck. They used bundles for pillows or just sat and leaned back against the side. Though he hadn't really expected to sleep at all, Daniel was surprised when he opened his eyes at the now familiar blast on the horn. The sun was up already and he heard Captain Filton telling his father that they had made unusually good time and should be reaching Fort Wayne by mid-morning.

The smell of frying bacon reached Daniel. He joined his father as they

looked for his mother and the younger children so they could eat their breakfast together. That would be the last meal they had on the boat.

"Ma, I've been talking to some of the other men who have stopped in Fort Wayne. They think that we would do well to stay at the Hedekin House until we get located or buy our land. It is a little expensive, but with you and Becky and the baby it seems like the best place to be. We will be able to see it from the canal I think, but there should be a representative from the hotel down to meet the boat. He will get us and our things to the hotel."

"I heard the same thing," Ma replied. "I think it is a good idea too, if you think we can afford it. Goodness knows, you will be busy enough and working hard enough if you are to get our home built before winter sets in. I



*Canal depot still standing on Superior Street.*

think you deserve a nice place to stay till you get started. A nice comfortable bed sounds like a good idea too, after last night's experience."

"Is that another canal over there?" asked Daniel as Captain Filton came up.

"Sort of, that is a feeder canal that brings water from the reservoir. There is a dam on the St. Joseph River about seven miles above Fort Wayne. There are flood gates to let the water in to keep the canal water at the right level for our boats." The captain pointed in the direction of the works he described.

Daniel and his father gathered the various bundles and packages of belongings together so they would be ready to unload when they docked in Fort Wayne.

## Fort Wayne At Last

Becky and Daniel stood together near the front of the boat to catch the first glimpse of their future home town. It wasn't long before they not only saw but heard the sounds of Fort Wayne.

"I hear music, Daniel, don't you?" Becky clapped her hands in delight.

"Yes, see on the dock there are two men playing the music. Jonathan told me that sometimes they ride on this boat or some other ones and they play for quite a while on the trip." Daniel watched as they came closer to the place they were to dock and tie up the boat.

"If you were going on beyond Fort Wayne you would go over the St. Mary's River on the Aqueduct. It is like a covered bridge, only with water in it as the whole canal is carried over the river." Captain Filton had come forward to supervise the docking. He

made sure the boat was securely tied before the passengers and their goods were unloaded.

Daniel thought everyone in the whole town must be at the docks to meet the boat and the captain agreed that was nearly the truth.

"Come, children, stay with your mother now so we will be ready to get off together." Pa came over to them. He held out his hand to the captain and told him what a pleasant trip it had been.

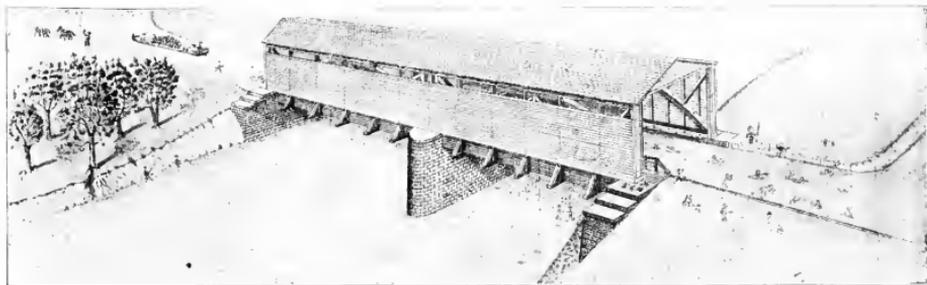
"It's been a pleasure to meet you and your family, Mr. Mathews. I've especially enjoyed Daniel, here. We may make a canal boat captain out of him one of these days. Now, remember to look up Mr. Sam Hanna when you get ready to buy your land. I'm sure he will have some sections that meet your needs and by all accounts he is fair in his dealings and a leading citizen of the town."

Daniel turned to wave goodbye to his friend Jonathan as he walked down the plank to the dock. He lost his footing and was momentarily unbalanced but he caught himself before he fell off into the water.

"Careful or they will think Lewis Cass is back in town," laughed Captain Filton as he waved a final farewell from the deck of the Indiana.



*Luxury canal packet boat travel.*



*Aqueduct over the St. Mary's River. Note swimmers on the right.*

### Vocabulary from A TRIP ON THE WABASH AND ERIE CANAL

**Packet** — a passenger boat used on canals.

**Lock** — an enclosed section of a canal with gates at each end, for raising or lowering vessels from one level to another by admitting or releasing water.

**Towpath** — a path along the bank of a canal for use in towing boats.

**Taut** — pulled tight.

**Berth** — a shelflike sleeping space for one person on a boat.

**Bowsman** — one of the members of the crew on the canal boats who usually worked at the front end of the boat.

**Sea level** — the level of the sea used as the base for measuring altitude.

**Steersman** — the member of the crew who steers the ship.

**Dry dock** — a structure built so as to keep a boat completely out of water for repairing.

**Coiled** — wound in regular circles.

**Berm** — the bank of land between the towpath and the canal.

**Boom** — The movable part of the gate of a canal lock.

**Flume** — the stream of water entering or leaving the lock to change the level.

**Reservoir** — a place where water is stored for use.

**Aqueduct** — a structure which carries a canal across a river.

Canal - a man made river







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